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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger project, a ninth-grade class participated in a year-long exchange of writing with students in an inner-city London classroom. The larger project involved 10 San Francisco Bay Area sixth- through ninth-grade classes exchanging writing with nine inner-city London classes and a Swedish class. Students and teachers in each of the 10 paired classrooms planned a number of writing activities which formed units of work. Some units were completed in a few days; others took months. Students wrote substantial pieces for a distant but real whole-class audience, and exchanged writing. The paired classes worked together to make their writing programs center on the exchange activities, and paired teachers worked collaboratively to decide on parallel topics for writing. The ninth-grade case study classroom was chosen for detailed study because the teacher turned over her entire writing program to the exchange; she and her students (mostly students of color with a long history of doing poorly in school) constructed the exchange collaboratively; and most of her students became highly involved in their writing. Students were interviewed and writing samples were collected. The teacher created a warm and caring community in which students felt comfortable with one another; she allowed different students different ways into learning; she provided support for the students when the British writing arrived; and she took advantage of opportunities to promote metacognitive control. (Contains three writing samples and excerpts from student interviews.) (RS)

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What's Involved?: Setting up a Writing Exchange

Sarah Warshauer Freedman
University of California at Berkeley

> I started opening up and ... instead of just doing it [writing], for credit or whatever, I was talking to a friend. And um I think, that made my reading, my writing better, because, I wanted to do it, you know, instead of just ahh! I gotta do this assignment. You know just writing something down. Yeah, okay, all right Ms. Franklin I'm finished, you know, or whatever. Give me the grade. You would ... think about what you're going to write because this is your friend now. You know you got to keep them up to date on what's going on, and so you would really work. You would really, you know, concentrate, and work hard on, um, trying to make it perfect. You know as best you can. (Interview, June 10, 1988)

Bridget Franklin's student, Easy E.,[1] along with students in ten classes in the San Francisco Bay area, grades six through nine, was involved in a year-long exchange of writing with students in a partner class abroad. With the exception of one Swedish class, all partner classes were in inner city London.[2] Through these writing exchanges pairs of teachers on both sides of the Atlantic worked to get students seriously involved in using written language, especially students with long histories of school failure. From their varied attempts, we learned that for these students to become involved writers, writing had to function for them, not just in the academic world of school but in their social worlds, especially through their relationships with their friends. After writing entered the peer network, it became possible to use this

[1]Easy E. is a pseudonym which he chose for himself; Easy E. and many of his African American classmates chose the names of popular rap artists. Teachers, students, and schools also are all identified by pseudonyms.

[2]The writing exchanges were part of a larger project comparing the teaching and learning of writing in England and the United States. That project and the writing exchanges are described fully in S. W. Freedman, *Exchanging Writing, Exchanging Cultures: Lessons in School Reform from the United States and Great Britain* (forthcoming from Harvard University Press).

inroad to help students achieve academic goals as well. I will describe what happened in Easy E.'s exchange class where, from the students' points of view, writing became fun and socially purposeful as well as academically meaningful.

The idea for setting up the writing exchanges came in 1985 when I was on sabbatical in England. Alex McLeod of the Institute of Education at the University of London introduced me to several London teacher-leaders who in turn were kind enough to invite me to visit their classrooms. On one of these visits, I met Ellie O'Sullivan, a teacher at Fulham Cross School for Girls in inner London. In her classroom, twelve- and thirteen-year-old students were in the middle of a writing exchange with a class in Sweden. They were involved in their writing in ways I had never witnessed before. As soon as I entered the classroom, I was surrounded by groups of children eager to show me not only the elaborate books they were writing about their school but their already-completed guidebooks to London for visiting Swedish teenagers. They also shared their reactions to Swedish storybooks and to textbooks that the Swedish class had sent them. Each sophisticated and elaborate project they mailed to Sweden extended over several months. The books about their school contained colorful illustrations, probing interviews with school officials, and insightful analyses of why they were learning what they were learning. They waited with excitement for each new package of writing from Sweden. Through their writing exchange they were learning about life and education in Sweden, but even more important, they were learning to be reflective about their own culture. In writing books about their school, for example, Ellie's students interviewed the head of the school and began to understand for the first time that there was a plan and an order to the school curriculum. They asked the head of the school the kinds of questions that often remain unasked when one is confined in one's own tightly-bounded world. At the same time, they were engaged in theoretically sound writing activities with an important purpose, function, and audience.

I became interested in the writing exchange as a possible vehicle for studying how students learn to write. Alex McLeod was interested in promoting writing exchanges as a part of writing in school, having worked in the late 1960s on an exchange project with students in five London schools (McLeod, 1969). Ellie was interested in sharing her ideas with other teachers and working with Alex and me on the exchange project. All three of us were

motivated by a desire to create a vision for improving and expanding students' literacy opportunities in urban schools in our respective countries.

Conceptualizing the Exchanges

Each of the ten pairs of teachers involved in the writing exchanges, together with their students, planned a number of writing activities, and these formed units of work. Students completed some of these writing units in just a few days, while they worked on others over weeks or even months. At the end of each unit, they mailed their writing to the partner class in the other country. Although there were differences in the ways different pairs of classes conceptualized their exchanges and in the degree to which they coordinated their writing activities, all exchanges shared four principles:

1. In no case did the writing exchange consist solely or even mostly of letter-writing. Although personal writing was encouraged and even facilitated, the main academic business of the exchanges was to provide an occasion for students in the two countries to write substantial pieces for a distant but real whole-class audience. These included, for example, autobiographies, books about their schools and their communities, fiction and poetry, essays about books they had read, and opinion pieces about important and often controversial issues.
2. Students in the paired classrooms exchanged writing across a year's time, although the amount and type of writing varied within and across exchange pairs.
3. The paired classes worked together to make their writing programs for the year center on the exchange activities, although classes varied in how completely they turned over their program to the exchange, both within exchange pairs and across pairs.
4. The paired teachers worked collaboratively to decide on some parallel topics for writing, but the degree and nature of the collaboration varied across pairings, as did student involvement in this collaboration across classrooms.

Following the Progress of an Exchange

I focus on Easy E.'s classroom because his teacher, Bridget Franklin, turned over her entire writing program to the exchange; she and her students constructed the exchange collaboratively; and most of her students became highly involved in their writing. Bridget teaches students at the older end of the spectrum, ninth grade, but their story illustrates the general principles that underlie an effective exchange for adolescent students in the middle school years. I further hypothesize that the principles this exchange illustrates also underlie the effective teaching of writing more generally, across the grades.

Easy E.'s class consisted mostly of students of color who had a long history of doing poorly in school. In fact, Easy E., like most of his classmates, had been in classes for low achievers for almost his entire school career. Many of Bridget's students never before had been asked to read whole books or to do any writing other than fill in blanks in workbooks or give short answers to factual questions about something they read.

Like Easy E., the majority of students in his class, 68%, were African Americans and 80% were students of color. The class was also mostly male, 79%, a mismatch with the demographics of the school, which was evenly divided along gender lines and which had 50% students of color. These demographics, mostly African American and male, are typical of low-tracked classes.

Bridget did not approve of ability grouping, and at the time of the exchanges was actively involved in getting her English department to abandon the practice. She worked hard to see that Easy E. and his peers received the same academic opportunities as students in honors classes.

The London class paired with Easy E.'s was taught by Philippa Furlong at Hampden Jones School in inner London. It was a mixed-ability Form 4 group, the equivalent of U.S. ninth grade. In Britain all the classes involved in the writing exchanges were mixed ability. There has been a successful movement against tracking in many London schools. Like her school, Philippa's class was about 50% Afro-Caribbean, 25% white, and the others were bilingual children of families who came from countries in the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and the Mediterranean. Philippa was in her fourth year teaching this same group.

She began with them when they entered secondary school at age 11. The British teachers commonly kept the same class for several years.

Creating Community

Before describing the exchange, I want to set the stage by describing the community Bridget created in her classroom. As Easy E. describes it:

> When we got in, she [Bridget] just established this was going to be our little family ... We would work together, and we would share all types of things, and you know, she made it very clear that ... she didn't want us teasing each other or nothing like that bad ... Everybody's her kid and ... she takes time and ... she just really cares for all the students. And you know, she wants everybody to ... help everybody ... And so once everybody ... recognized what she was doing, everybody cooperated ... I never been that close with many of my friends like I have now ... My friends come over, spend the night, we go to the movies, and it's just like, some of them are my brothers and stuff you know. We see each other every day at school and it's not like, you know, I go home and then I hang around with my friends at home and stuff here. We spend a lot of time together. (Interview, March 21, 1988)

Bridget cared about her students the way a mother cares about her children. In turn, her students treated their classmates like family members. The nurturing atmosphere in Bridget's classroom created an environment in which students worked together and supported one another's efforts.

Bridget's classroom was so inviting that her students felt comfortable asking their friends to visit during their free time. Students congregated in Bridget's room before school, during lunch, and after school. They knew that during free time the classroom was a place where they could talk to friends, meet one another, talk to Bridget, or do schoolwork. Bridget was so accommodating that she even gave her students rides home so that they could stay for after-school activities.

During class Bridget's students were free to move around the room and work with their friends. In fact, movement was essential because the students did much of their writing in-class at the computers that ringed the room. Bridget was fortunate to have twelve IBM PC jr.'s in her classroom, not

enough for everyone but enough for convenient sharing. As the students shared the computers, they were free to talk to their friends about their writing (see Greenleaf [1994] for a full explanation of how the computers helped Bridget increase the quantity and quality of student talk in her classroom).

Bridget's nurturing was not without a strong academic edge. She demanded a great deal of her students, and they came through for her. Easy E. contrasts Bridget's way of pushing student to do their best with the more punitive approach of his past teachers:

> Like if, uh, I missed a assignment, you know, a teacher would just say, "Okay, you have a detention ... and you got a make it up," or something. She [Bridget] will really stick to you and make you do it. I mean it's like she's your mother ... She really pressures you because she wants you to do good, and you know, most teachers it's just like they give you the grade. But she really wants you to ... make an effort and try harder.

The close community in Bridget's classroom ultimately inspired the students to develop new attitudes toward literacy activities:

> The first week [of the exchange] we were like, "I don't, we don't really know about all this." And so then, um, after, um, a couple of days we got in the habit of doing the same things, and ... wow, I haven't never did nothing like that. I mean, you know, I was enjoying it, and, like, when something was wrong, like, she would come to me and ask me to help and ... I was happy for her to come to me, and ask me to help somebody.

Thus, Bridget built community in a number of emotionally supportive ways: through her explicit actions (for example, opening her classroom during students' free time, giving students rides home), her subtle interactions with her students (which showed both firmness and caring), and the tone she set for appropriate student interactions (cooperation, sharing, and helping one another).

To further build a supportive community, Bridget also took advantage of structures external to her classroom. Of these, the most important were students' families, whom she involved in the intellectual life of the classroom. For example, she routinely telephoned parents to let them know about their children's progress; by the end of September she had called every

child's parent or guardian. Her initial call served to establish a partnership with each family. Then, Bridget explained, if she needed to call a student's parents about a problem later in the year, they would already know her as a caring teacher. During the year Bridget talked in this way with every family a minimum of two or three times, to compliment the student and/or to enlist the family's help with problems. Bridget also produced a newsletter for parents and guardians twice each quarter. The newsletter served to keep parents, who were often uncomfortable visiting the school, connected to what was happening in her class. Many parents even wrote pieces for the newsletter. Parental writing thus became a part of the classroom culture. The newsletter also stimulated the students' thinking and became a basis for ongoing classroom conversations.

In the end, because she established a safe, caring, and inclusive community, she was able to work out a demanding curriculum with her students. As the unfolding story of this writing exchange will show, Bridget was able to frame activities for the writing exchange in ways that drew on the classroom and wider community to integrate the social and the academic aspects of the students' lives.

Introducing the Writing

As the first unit of writing for the exchange, the two classes wrote "introductory letters." Through the letters, Bridget's students began to develop social connections to one another, both within their own class and within the British class. These connections allowed the students to get to know the needs of their foreign audience, to come to trust the students from abroad, and to feel safe communicating with them.

When the U.S. students wrote their letters, they had not yet received anything from England. As Bridget recalled in an interview, "They wrote in a very safe, kind of formal letters.... That's just how they felt that they were supposed to write" (Interview, December 13, 1988). As her student Easy E. confirmed, "I mean people were, we were at first um, we were like, tightened—tightened up you know" (Interview, March 21, 1988). Indeed, Easy E.'s letter seems tight, although his personal voice is present:

Dear Girls and Boys in England,

My name is Easy E. and I am 14 years old and I love to play sports like football, basketball, and track.

I've played football and run track for a team but I've never played basketball for a team.

He concludes:

I would like to know if any of you girls or guys have any plans to come to America and visited.

I would like to know something you think that makes your school special. Here at Los Padres High School we have our own radiostation.

Your friend ...

Easy E.

Geya's letter is slightly more adventurous and less constrained than those of the other students:

Hi, My name is Geya Anderson but mostly everyone at home and school calls me Gey. I am a black afro American and I am 5 ft. 2'. I have black hair that goes down to my neck. When I was small I had very long hair but as I grew up it kind of broke off. Most of the time I still wish I had long hair but I know that if I keep it up my wish just might come true.

Then after describing her family she wrote:

You know I would like to ask you something now if I am kind of making you angry then I apologize but I would like to know if you have any black people out there. The reason I am asking is because I only see the other color on T.V. and I was just curious.

The British research team noted that Geya's question about whether or not there were blacks in England and her comment about the absence of black people on British television provoked a profound discussion in Philippa's class about the representation of blacks on British television, one that continued all year. The students returned to this theme many times during

the year. Geya's question was an important step toward friendship and understanding between the black students in the two classes.

Easy E. summed up the U.S. students' initial sense of their British audience: "They're so far away, I was thinking of them of like aliens" (Interview, March 10, 1988).

Then the letters arrived from England and the students "over there" were suddenly no longer "aliens." Most important in opening up the connection was the following letter from Titch:

Hi to all you funky def people, in 9th grade, its [redacted]

I will start by telling you a bit about my self, I am 14 years old and will be 15 years on January 2nd.

I go to an school called [redacted] Burlington Danes, I am in the 5th Year [will just started]

I suppose its quite good fun, doing our project and finding things out for your self.

At the moment we are doing course work for are New exam, GCSE.

In England our years are different from the ones in America, We have Years and you have grades.

Well enough about school, ill talke about the things I do!!!

I Love goingout with friends especially travlling.

I Also Love going at Jams [parties]. That brings me on to anothor point, I am one person who cant do with out music.

Especially, Hip Hop, Soul, Reggae. I hate heavey metal and all of that pop.

You must write me, who ever I am speaking to?!?

I have been to America, New Jearsy It was beautiful.

When I grow up I would Love to come over and live. [Hopefully]

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England is not bad, I suppose most of the time its pretty cold, Apart from that its okay Oh before I forget I am also an freaky person, well me and my cousin L , she is in the same class and is also writing a letter to you all. We wear really freaky outfits, As for the hair, our hair, well that's freaky too.

I do suppose your freaky too who ever you are?

I have got an Tag, It is bride thats what I am known as

Anyway, I will hope ill here from you. Have my address again Luv ya

xx

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Although from Philippa's point of view Titch was not the most eloquent writer, she spoke to her audience quite well. Philippa reported that Titch was the only student in the class who had needed special help with her skills. Titch was masterful, though, at establishing common ground with Bridget's students—through her use of black vernacular language, her musical tastes, her love of parties, and even her love of the United States. She opened the exchange to the popular culture of the students in both countries. Titch made herself so likable and real that many of the ninth-grade boys in Bridget's class fell in love with her, and several of the girls became jealous. No teacher could have given the academic plans for the exchange as effective an endorsement as Titch did when she wrote, "I suppose it's quite good fun, doing our project and finding things out for your self"; or when she pleaded, "You must write me, who ever I am speaking to?!?"

Easy E. stressed the importance of Titch's letter as well as several other British letters to his class's attitudes and to their immediate ease and identification with this new audience:

> At first ... I wasn't really interested ... I guess everybody, you know, we just took it like an assignment ... you know, we gotta do this for a grade ... she [Bridget] explained it, but I guess, we didn't really catch on until after, you know, we got letters from England and everybody was like wow! ... so we really got into it, and we started telling them about, like, what we do out here, and it was really fun, but like in the first beginning, I guess, you know, we were just like, you know, we were just, you know, we'll do what she says cause that's, you know, what she wants.
>
> ....
>
> The way they wrote their letters it was really like, I mean, they were our friends, and we didn't even really meet them. I mean we was, you know, they was talking to us, and I was like, I mean, you know, I never ... expected nothing like it.
>
> ....
>
> They did basically what, what we did, but it was just, you know, they were in a different country and stuff. And it was just like, you know, it was another me over there. (Interview, March 21, 1988)

So all of a sudden the British audience went from being "like aliens" to being "like another me over there," quite a transformation. The social connections formed through the letters continued to develop with other writing as the

students drew on their popular culture, writing raps to one another, sharing graffiti tags, and using teen slang. By welcoming their social worlds in this way, Bridget was forming an important base for future more traditionally academic work.

Moving on to Autobiographies: Supporting Diverse Approaches and Encouraging Metacognition

The next unit of writing consisted of autobiographies, which Bridget's and Philippa's students wrote over several months. The students often meshed academic and social purposes, sometimes writing to particular individuals and sometimes to the whole class, sometimes using formal language and sometimes using the language of the streets. For example, Ice T. devoted a special section of his autobiography to Titch:

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Fresh means really brilliant and original in U.S. vernacular black English; Easy E. was likely playing with the double entendre. In the middle of his autobiography Easy E. wrote a quite protective note to Titch as well:

> I hope to get a letter from Titch because she is freaky. My friend Easy E. and all the boys in the class really like Titch but someone should tell her that freak means a whole different meaning in America than it does in England. It does not mean what you think it means—out here it means that you like to have sex a lot. I hope you are not mad at me for telling you this.

The "whole different meaning" of the word "freaky" on the streets of the U.S. is illustrated well in a song, at its most popular in the early 80s in the States, "Super Freak," by Rick James. Selected lyrics follow:

> She's a very kinky girl.
> The kind you don't bring home to Mother.
> She will never let your spirits down.
> Once you get her off the street. (Oh girl)
> She likes the boys in the band.
> She says that I'm her all time favorite.
> When I make the move to her room it's the right time.
> She's never hard to please. (Oh no).
> ...
> She's a superfreak, superfreak. She's superfreaky. Yow! (Everybody sing). Superfreak. Superfreak!

The students in Bridget Franklin's class undoubtedly knew this song well. The "whole different meaning" of "freaky" that Easy E. referred to was someone who is extremely sexual, even a bit kinky. Titch used another meaning for freaky, weird in an original and idiosyncratic way, extraordinary. This meaning is also current in the U.S. It seems highly likely that Titch was leading the boys on with a set of quite intentional multiple messages.

In his writing Ice T. showed the tension he felt between the personal and the group audience. He slid into these words to Titch right after he was discussing the topic of sports for the whole class. Ironically, when Easy E. first began to orient himself to Titch, he continued to address the group and

excluded Titch as an outsider ("someone should tell her"). But then he used an ambiguous "you" that could refer to either the group or Titch ("It does not mean what you think it means") and finally Ice T. addressed Titch with a "you" that could only have been for Titch herself ("I hope you are not mad at me").

Like Ice T., his friends Cool J. and Easy E., also discussed feeling an immediate closeness to the students in London once their letters arrived. Cool J. went a step further to emphasize the positive effects on his writing: "Now I ... feel like I know some of the people over there—you just open up and write to them" (Interview, March 10, 1988).

When the students wrote their autobiographies, Bridget worked hard to involve the entire class. She purposefully allowed different students to be drawn in to the exchange in different ways. It would certainly have been easy to let the social, vocal, and enthusiastic large group of African American males take over, but Bridget saw other students who were responding differently, who after the British letters arrived, did not feel an immediate closeness to their distant audience. These students needed to take time to get to know the British students better. Geya, who was open at first, became more cautious. A loner in her own class, she took some time to warm up to the students from abroad. Although less "tight" than Easy E. in her first letter, Geya began the year feeling much more comfortable with her teacher Bridget as an audience than with her peers in her own class or with the students in Britain. Bridget explained:

> From the very first she [Geya] wrote really long things. Now that's not true of her papers for them [the British students]. But when she writes stories for me, or she writes summaries or something, she really takes her time.
>
> ....
>
> She's just terrifically shy, and that's very inhibiting with her writing when she's writing for somebody else, but when she's writing for me I think she really, she wants to please me a lot. (Interview, February 24, 1988)

Given the diverse ways the students were responding to the British audience and their varied levels of comfort with their peers in their own class as an audience, Bridget had to work hard to help them all feel socially comfortable. For the most part, the students wrote their autobiographies in

class on the computers. Easy E. described how he and his friends helped each other at the computer:

> She [Bridget Franklin] wanted, uh, it [the autobiography] to be perfect I guess. And so everybody was, "Okay. Okay. I'll change this." And ... you know. So it, it was, I mean everybody helped each other out, and stuff. And so then we got on the computers. And, you know, we were thinking about, "Oh I think I should change this," and, you know, we were asking each other for help, and everybody was helping each other.... We were just, it we were just, having fun, I mean, cause I get—I—no—I think I can speak for everybody when I say um, most of—most of the kids in the class we we never did nothing like that. It just—we just got into it. And it was exciting, and we wanted to keep it going, keep going. (Interview, March 21, 1988)

Cool J. confirmed this collaborative spirit:

> In my class, Run helped me. You know me and him we'd, we would always work next to each other cause we both sports fans, so we talk about the hoop game or—and you know I'd ask him—you know we'd—we'd just helped each other out. I'd ask him how you spell this, and how should I put this and it went the same for him. We helped each other a lot. (Interview, March 10, 1988)

It would be easy to let Easy E. "speak for everybody," as he said he could do, to hear only his and Cool J.'s positive messages. But Rose, for example, when asked if she worked with anyone at the computer, replied, "No. Um I do better by myself" (Interview, March 2, 1988). Geya, too, in keeping with her caution about a peer audience, described her difficulties composing publicly at the computer:

> Every time I get ready to write, or to type or something everybody would try to come over my shoulder and look and I don't like that.... They just come and watch and try to peek at my stuff. Say "Don't look, get away!" And I'll be hiding with my hands. They just trying to steal my stuff.... They nosy. They want to know what I do. Cause I'm a loner, and you know, I like to—I like being by myself. And they just want to know what my business is, "Yeah that's my business, get away!" (Interview, March 21, 1988)

When Geya was asked in the same interview, "Is there anybody that—that you—you let share it with?" she quickly replied, "Ms. Franklin."

As Easy E., Ice T., and Cool J. composed their autobiographies, they discussed their concern for their British audience. Easy E. thought about what to "tell them" so they could "get to know me a little bit better." Similarly, Ice T. explained, "I erased about a million words that I didn't like"; when asked why, he replied, "Cause you— I had to make sure that it sounded right to them, it was interesting not boring." When asked how he made his writing interesting, he replied, "You just have to have a imagination.... you have to think in your head just what is interesting to you it might be interesting to them" (Interview, March 21, 1988).

Predictably, at this point Geya and Rose's talk indicated that they remained less oriented toward the needs of the British audience. When Geya was asked why she included a particular piece of information, she replied, "I thought it would be interesting to write about, some some humor in there. It was the truth I mean you know it was the truth" (Interview, March 21, 1988). She only mentioned the British students after she was asked directly if anything in their letters gave her thoughts about what would interest them. Bridget allowed students with needs as different as Geya's and Easy E.'s to find their own ways into writing.

At this point, Bridget began actively to use the British writing to help her students analyze what made writing effective—to help them develop metacognitive awareness, to come to know general principles behind effective writing and to become aware that they knew these principles. Bridget talked together with her students about the writing that came from England. As they talked about the British work, Bridget guided her students in discussions of the qualities that made the British autobiographies interesting and made the U.S. student readers feel that they actually knew particular writers. By this time the students were so involved in the exchange that this academic discussion mattered to them; it could help them connect better with their friends from abroad. Bridget wrote in her journal:

> I noticed that as I went along it was easy to point out things about effective writing to the kids. The British kids who write the most interesting autobiographies were those who showed not told and who gave enough background information to make themselves clear. Those whose stories were mere lists of places and events received the poorest

ratings by my students. We talked a lot about the students that we liked best from what they wrote and the students we felt we knew best (usually one and the same) and we discussed why we had those feelings. The kids clearly got the point that they need to "jump off the page" in order to engage their reader.

Producing Traditionally Academic Writing

As the year went on, Bridget worked with her students to produce more traditionally academically serious work. They wrote papers about holidays; they wrote about *Romeo and Juliet*, which they had read and acted out in class; they wrote about controversial issues, and some wrote booklets of short stories or pieces about how to succeed at Los Padres High School.

For his holiday paper in January, Cool J. wrote about Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday because, as he said, he doesn't think students know enough about what Dr. King did, and he thinks we all, in the U.S. and in England, need to continue to remember the importance of Dr. Martin Luther King. In an interview, Cool J. expressed his strong motivation for writing on this topic. First of all, he was frustrated with some of his fellow students' attitudes about their heritage, "Most of the blacks in the class and in that school, you know, they just walk around like it ain't no big trip, you know." Cool J. stressed how important it is to recognize those who come before us and the contributions that they give to our present society. Bridget helped Cool J. produce a serious essay about Dr. King which he concluded with the following heartfelt words:

> I celebrate Dr. King's birthday by just thinking about what he did for me. Dr. King didn't want to be remembered for all the awards he won and his education, but for what he did for his people. Times aren't as bad as they used to be, but in some parts of Southern America blacks are still treated like # * @ %. Last year in Georgia blacks got together to march (led by Reverend Jesse Jackson) in an all- white county in honor of Dr. King. The whites didn't want the blacks to march. The whites threw rocks and sang "go home nigger's." But blacks kept on keeping on.
>
> Dr. King won a lot of awards. One of the most famous was the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. King touched a lot of people's lives. Because of Dr. King Reverend Jesse Jackson is running for the democratic spot for the up coming presidential election. Rev. Jesse

> Jackson isn't the first black person to run but, the first to have a national campaign. In Arizona which is a state in the U.S. their govenor didn't want to honor Dr. King's birthday. I'm kind of upset that it took from 1968 to 1983 to honor Dr. King's birthday.
>
> I hope you like what I wrote to you. And I would like to hear from a black student and hear what he or she knows or has to say.

In an interview, Cool J. said that this piece of writing "came from the heart ... I thought about all he did, not just for blacks, but for everyone, you know. He was a good man." We asked Cool J. if he had to choose just one piece of his writing to go to England, which it would be. He said he would send the Martin Luther King piece rather than his own autobiography because "Little Cool J., you know, they can wait to know about Cool J." Cool J. says he is somebody but Martin Luther King is somebody. King is already famous, and "because it is a different country maybe they should know about him."

The British research team reported that Cool J.'s essay had a great impact on the students in Philippa's class. Alex McLeod was in the classroom the day Philippa's students first saw the holiday papers. They sat in groups of three or four reading, and Philippa invited each student to choose one to read aloud to the class. McLeod reported that Tootsie, after reading Cool J.'s piece, announced to the class that she was going to read this one aloud and that she was going to write to Cool J. about it. Tootsie's need to respond to Cool J. was so urgent that, encouraged by Philippa, she wrote the following on the back of a letter Philippa was preparing to send to Bridget:

> To Cool J., I'm just writing a short message to say that I thought your essay on the national holiday of Martin Luther King was very interesting and that I agreed with your point that it took them from 1968 up to 1983 before they decided to honour the many great things that he did. Not only for black Americans but for people all over the world.

In an interview, Cool J. proudly volunteered the following information: "I received a note from Tootsie. She said she liked it and appreciated how I wrote it and she agreed with my point that it took from 1968 to 1983 just to honor his birthday" (Interview, March 10, 1988).

In her February letter, Philippa reported an enthusiastic response of British students to the U.S. holiday essays, crediting the exchange audience—

and by implication its cross-cultural aspect—with dramatically heightening motivation for writing for a number of the students in her class. Cool J.'s friend, Easy E., informed the U.S. researchers that the British kids especially liked Cool J.'s piece because "he wrote about Martin Luther King, and you know, they don't have that holiday so, they were interested in that" (Interview, June 10, 1988).

When the holiday papers arrived from England, Ice T. recalled that "Miss Franklin lined us up in like a circle and she passed one out to everybody, we all read it, we read it out loud." It is important to note here that the students needed support reading; otherwise they would not have been able to take advantage of the opportunity to reflect on the writing or to make the social connections—it was not easy for them to read and appreciate students' writing that came from another country and they needed help on multiple levels.

As the year went on Geya began to write to the British students with the kind of trust she placed earlier only in Bridget even though she remained too shy to open up to her peers in her own class. We see the payoff for allowing Geya her way into the exchange. For the Shakespeare assignment—to help students connect to the motivations of Romeo and Juliet, Bridget asked her students to write about a rash deed of their own. Geya told about a truly rash deed. She cut school when she was twelve to go off with a twenty-one-year-old man. Geya wanted to share her experience with the students in England because she hoped the British students would learn from her mistake even though she emphasized that she did not actually do anything really bad.

Easy E. who wrote about his father's rash deed explained how he differentiated between audiences at this point in the year:

> Like if I was talking to um Ice T. or Rex or you know, just one of my friends I be with everyday, just you know, writing a letter to them, you know, and you know we be together everyday, so I would say, "Man wasn't that crazy what my father did," you know and have it, you know, where they you know, man that was, man I would never do that, you know, and have 'em so you know they would probably laugh, and say, you know, just you know, something really different because, you know, I be with them all the time. This is just some of like a way, you know, you can make em laugh, so you can just write something. (Interview, April 28, 1988)

Finally, some of Bridget's students wrote moving responses to controversial issue papers from England. For example, Geya, now fully involved, wrote a response to a piece arguing against abortion. In her response which was longer than the original piece Geya concurred that abortion is basically wrong, but after a brief paragraph in which she stated this point and qualified it, she quickly moved on to discuss her feelings about teenage pregnancy. She marked this shift: "Now on the mother of the child that is having a child is a different matter, not the murder part but the taking care of the child part." She later revealed in her writing:

> ... all the girls that I know are pregant and are 13-17 yrs. old it seems to me that they are just saying I don't care anymore so getting pregant is the first answer to their supposibly problem and I just don't think it is fair It just hurts my heart to see all the young people getting pregant and don't have a red cent to take care of it.

She concluded that the parents of such pregnant girls must take some blame for their daughters' predicaments and wrote about how thankful she was that her mother watched, warned, and looked out for her:

> I am so lucky without even knowing it and as soon as I go home today I'm going to thank my mom so much and tell her how much I love her and that I'm so glad she taught me the strings and glad that she shows me that she loves me. I believe that if the parents was there when the child needs them then this can prevent alot of pregancies. Don't You Think So!!!!!!!!!!!!

Merging the Social and the Academic

In his good-bye letter, Easy E. reviewed his writing across the year and explained how his views about the exchange shifted:

> I've been looking over some of the papers that I have wrote at the first part of the year and I found out that I like most of them but some parts I feel different about like when I said wrighting to you would be just another assignment for me.

When I first made this statement I didn't know how much fun it would be to write to you guys.... once I new my way around the school and started to meet more and more new people I started to feel good about myself and I really got into writeing to you guys.

Fittingly, Geya, whose needs may have remained invisible in many classrooms, included a tribute to Bridget, an important last word that provided an essential insight into why Franklin's students seemed, across the board, to get so much from their exchange:

You know what I like about going and being school is my teachers I never knew of a teacher being so understanding and noticable as I noticed with my English teacher Mrs. Franklin I mean I noticed when she is really concerned what happens to most of her students that tries to help themselves.

Geya, the loner, was been allowed social entry into the academic life of this very social exchange just as the more sociable Cool J., Easy E., and Ice T. were.

After this exchange was over, I was fortunate to have an African American university student, Ruth Forman, working on this project as a summer research intern. Ruth was interested in the significant role played by rap and popular culture in making the exchange something so socially popular with the African American youngsters in the class. She knew some up-and-coming professional rap artists in California and shared some raps the students wrote with them. One of these rap artists, Julian Brooks of the rap group "Mod Squad," reviewed the students' writing and was moved to write the following rap about the exchange:

Teacher you're cool
Word to the Mother
Thanks for letting me talk like a brother

Give me their address
And I will express
All the things I wish I could of said on a test

See cause where I'm from
The way I talk ain't dumb

It's not because I'm poor you know or cause
I'm from the slums

It goes much further back
It's how we interact

It's fun to mac it's fun to cap
The language of the Black

The English kids wrote Hi Hello
We like Hip-Hop We like soul
Yea Boyee!! Rap is def
When we read this we lost our breath

We wrote them here's what we wrote:
"You London folk are kind of dope."

We wrote in rap to show our scene
They wrote back like it's no thing

They hear where we're coming from
Now we're not the only ones
© 1989 Julian Brooks, "Mod Squad"

During the year of the cross-national writing exchange Julian Brooks saw magic and opportunity in Bridget's classroom, but the exchange alone did not create the magic or the opportunity. Rather, Bridget structured her classroom in ways that generated magic and allowed her students to take advantage of available opportunities. In particular, she created a warm and caring community in which students felt comfortable with one another and that was welcoming not just to the students but to their friends and families. Second, she allowed different students different ways in to learning; there were not right and wrong ways to become involved. Third, she provided support for the students when the British writing arrived; her students read the writing aloud, discussed it, and discussed and organized responses to it. Fourth, Bridget took advantage of opportunities to promote metacognitive control;

she used the British writing to help her students reflect on and label features that make writing successful to an audience of strangers and then she helped students integrate those features into their own writing. It is important to say here that as the year went on, the writing from England became relatively sparse; the British students were preparing for national examinations, and their exams interfered with their ability to carry through fully with the exchange. However, Bridget had structured her classroom so that her students' academic progress was not dependent on anything from their partner class.

I will close the story of this writing exchange with a few more words from Easy E., as he prepared to move on to his next year in school. We asked him whether he thought he would be able to apply what he had learned from writing for the exchange to future and perhaps more traditional school writing. He reflected back on his experience:

> I was writing to some friends, and so then I cared about what I was writing. And then, you know, that slowed it down, and, you know, I took my time. And, you know I got it all finished. And that would be a way I would write to a teacher. I would make sure everything's, you know, best as it could be. (Interview, June 10, 1988)

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